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ABSTRACT

The paper describes and analyzes implementation procedures of a program for gifted students in a private boarding school for boys in South Africa. It examines the influence of factors such as time management, balance, staffing, staff attitudes, availability of resources, programs, long and short term objectives, and curriculum perspectives. Sections examine the gifted identification process; the concept of giftedness; the gifted as social and "sporting" individuals; and the need for the curriculum to be balanced and inclusive, offer individual attention, and encourage the pursuit of excellence. Also noted are the school's statement of purpose, the balance provided by voluntary choices within compulsory requirements, and the need to help gifted students manage their time well. Program activities in the areas of general culture, English, geography, history, mathematics, science, art, and Afrikaans are described. (DB)

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Attempts to establish a structured programme for gifted and exceptionally-able pupils in a South African High School

by

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Neither this paper nor any version close to it has been, or is being, offered for publication. The paper will be presented orally at Ingenium 2000 by the author.

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This paper attempts to describe and analyse implementation-procedures with respect to programmes for Gifted and Exceptionally-Able pupils in a private all-boarding South African High School for Boys.

It examines the influence of factors such as

- time-management
- balance
- staffing
- staff-attitudes
- availability of resources
- programmes
- long and short term objecitves

and perspectives on the curriculum.

1 INTRODUCTION

Michaelhouse is the Diocesan College for boys in Natal. While it is an Anglican foundation it accepts pupils of any or no religious affiliation and from any race group. All pupils are boarders. There are seven boarding houses. The school is situated 50 kms north west of Pietermaritzburg in the Natal Midlands at Balgowan. The school has book and audio-visual libraries and a very well-equipped resources centre. The staff pupil ratio is 11:1.

It is against this background that observations and comments related to the establishment of a programme for exceptionally-able and/or gifted pupils have been planned.

2 IDENTIFICATION OF EXCEPTIONALLY-ABLE AND GIFTED PUPILS

This identification, although not arbitrary, is something of a non-empirical exercise at Michaelhouse. The SAGT IQ scores are used to indicate boys who are:

a) likely to be exceptionally-able or gifted;

b) potentially gifted but under-achieving.

In addition, preparatory and primary school reports are carefully scrutinised, involvement and performance in the school's cultural, social service and sporting programmes are noted, and particular areas of individual creativity are looked for.

Using an IQ score of 135+ as gifted, 6.25% of the pupils qualify;

Using an IQ score of 130-135 as exceptionally able, 6.25% of the pupils qualify.

3.1 THE CONCEPT OF GIFTEDNESS

For practical purposes the concept of the exceptionally-able or gifted at Michaelhouse does not - and should not - include the intellectual/academic factor only. It is contended that 'giftedness' also manifests itself in other important areas of educational and life experiences viz sport, social obligations and cultural learning. Accordingly, programmes of extension and enrichment for exceptionally-able pupils are devised to cater for pupils who are very able in all or some of 4 basic aspects of education i e academic, cultural, sporting and social - the emphasis in the latter being on social responsibility and service to others.

3.2 THE GIFTED AS SOCIAL AND SPORTING INDIVIDUALS

Not much if any research appears to have been done in the field to indicate as broad a view as this in identifying and meeting the needs of exceptionally-able and gifted pupils. Researchers and workers tend to stress the role and capacity of the intellect taking into account the overall growth of the pupil. Lamentably few touch on social

responsibility and/or sporting prowess on the part of the exceptionally-able. For example in a list of 80 suggested exercises or projects in which exceptionally-able pupils might be involved, only 7 could be described as implying a concern and consideration for one's fellow-man (1). The rest are designed to stimulate problem-solving, a creative and imaginative response, and an opportunity to extend original thought. The deeper philosophical issues at the root of this level of investigation involve consideration of the exceptionally-able as a total person, not merely as a laboratory boffin. What the world needs surely are clever and considerate people.

As the development director of a new free residential public high school for gifted students in North Carolina says: "We weren't looking for bookworms. We were looking for movers and shakers" (2).

4.1 CURRICULUM PERSPECTIVES

The Michaelhouse approach to educating adolescent boys is characterised by 3 factors:

- a balanced and inclusive curriculum
- individual attention and involvement
- the pursuit of excellence.

All boys participate in academic, cultural, social, spiritual and sporting areas of the curriculum, which is defined as encompassing 'all activities organised for the educational benefit of the pupils'. This

broad and inclusive identification of the curriculum means in practice that all educational experiences e g maths lessons, cricket practices, stage productions, photographic competitions, debating society meetings, outdoor activities etc are conceived as curricular. An approach such as this means, in turn, that more children can be reached as individuals and a climate created in which strengths are emphasised and positively reinforced through acknowledgement, extension, recognition and enrichment.

As Belle Wallace comments: "All children, including the very able, should be educated according to their individual capacities" (3).

The emphasis then is on the development of individuality within the group rather than a sterile and self-centered individualism.

4.2 THE SCHOOL'S KEY OBJECTIVE

The raison d'etre or Key Objective of Michaelhouse is: "To provide an education which develops every pupil's spiritual, social, moral, academic, cultural and physical abilities and which acknowledges and seeks to meet his individual needs so that with opportunity, encouragement and disciplined Christian guidance he may emerge a socially responsible person with a balanced outlook on life."

5.1 THE FACTOR OF BALANCE

In this attempt to educate pupils as individuals one is looking to a balance between compulsory involvement and voluntary choice e g at Michaelhouse all pupils must participate culturally but there is a free choice from 40 societies and activities; all pupils must be involved in service to others but they can choose which projects or areas they wish to become involved in; all pupils must attend 3 chapel services per week but on the other 3 days there is a free choice (there is no service on Mondays when Assembly is held); all pupils must play games and there are 16 sports offered and so on. A balanced programme of educationally-enriched experiences is provided which still allows for expression of individuality. Where conflict arises, the individual's needs are paramount.

5.2 MANAGEMENT OF TIME

All exceptionally-able and gifted pupils follow this general programme but an analysis is made - and records kept - of their special circumstances, abilities and needs. IQ's are checked against performance with some attention paid to the differential factor between Verbal and Non-verbal scores. Apart from the normal testing, reporting and evaluating procedures, these pupils participate in programmes designed to enrich, stimulate, and extend over and above the norm.

Heads of Subject Departments i e History, Science etc meet with the Rector and Senior Master to discuss the exceptionally-able pupils programme, amongst other educational issues at least 4 times per annum. In addition, the item "exceptionally-able pupils" is a standard entry on all Departmental Meeting Agendas - drawn up for a minimum of twice-quarterly meetings.

Each Head of Department has received an article "Some Observations on the Exceptionally-Able Pupil and Ways of Approaching his Education at Michaelhouse" which looks at the following factors - GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS, DISTINGUISHING FEATURES, PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS, EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES, THE ROLE OF TEACHERS (4).

Heads of Departments devise programmes in consultation with teachers and, in most cases, with the boys themselves - with varying levels of success. It has become clear that, in a school with a 100% pupil involvement in the broadly-defined curriculum, efficient management of time is a prerequisite for success particularly with the exceptionally-able pupil, who is often a multi-talented person. One of the real problems is that an exceptionally-able or gifted pupil is 'spread too thin'. Teachers, therefore, discuss individual timetables with exceptionally-able pupils to monitor involvement and possible 'overload'.

6.1 PROGRAMMES AND INVOLVEMENT

Boys in groups spanning up to two standards - with one or 2 teachers as well - meet during 2 quarters per year with the Rector for a loosely-structured series of stimulation and extension exercises. This is nearly all group 'work' and is designed to create opportunities for healthy social interaction and intellectual cross-pollination. For more senior pupils the following activities are arranged:

i) listening to recordings from SABC radio programmes:
   a) University of the Air;
   b) Radio Chaplain;
   c) Science for Tomorrow;
   d) Microphone in;
   followed by discussion.

ii) the same approach for cassette-recordings of some inaugural lectures at the University of Natal e g
   a) "Living in a Critical Community" - Prof A E Voss;
   b) "Truth & Illusion in History - Prof A Duminy.

iii) listening to and discussing afterwards a recording of a debate between Herzog and Arnold Toynbee on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

iv) listening to Standard Musical Classics such as:
   a) Dvorak's New World Symphony;
   b) Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1;

c) Grieg's Piano Concerto in A Minor;

d) Vivaldi's Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra etc.

v) visits to orchestral concerts, lectures e g Robin Hallett on 'Contemporary Africa' etc.

vi) problem-solving exercises.

6.2.1 ENGLISH

i) participation in 'outside' competitions e g Alan Paton Literary, Jan Hofmeyr & Shell Public Speaking, Victoria League Essay & Spelling, and the National English Olympiad;

ii) creative writing with contributions published in the school magazine, 'As You Like It' etc;

iii) visiting lecturers - although this is not confined to exceptionally-able pupils alone;

iv) Prize Essays - an internal competition;

v) participation in the Interhouse Public-Speaking contest.

6.2.1 GEOGRAPHY

i) preparation and presentation of a section of a lesson;

ii) seminars on specific topics;

iii) project-work of an interdisciplinary nature.

6.2.2 HISTORY

i) visiting speakers e g Colonel Peter Francis to talk on 'The Battle of El Alamein';

ii) participation in the Young Historians' Conference;

iii) individual reading for exceptionally-able pupils;

iv) counselling and goal-setting.

6.2.3 MATHEMATICS

i) programmes involving greater originality in problem-solving;

ii) participation in the Mathematics Olympiad - which involves extended prep. programmes.

6.2.4 SCIENCE

i) participation in the Science Olympiad;

ii) presentation of papers to the PINSSA Conference e g topics such as:

a) "Home-built dye laser", "Purification of Salt in Industry", "Electronic Pulse-rate Meter", "Osmotic Tolerance of Some Plants" - all by Standard 7 pupils;

b) "Biology & Utilization of Mopane Worms" by a matric pupil;

c) "Model Rocketry", "High-speed Photography", "Number Numbness" and "Extra-sensory Perception" - by Standard 8 & 9 pupils;

iii) a course in electronics for junior exceptionally-able pupils.

Special topics involving reading and research at a greater depth and greater input and involvement.

6.2.6 AFRIKAANS

i) a deeper look at particular authors e g Opperman DJ, Schoeman PJ;

ii) reading lists including works by W A de Klerk, Etienne le Roux, and talks to the class.

7.1 INVOLVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

How are the exceptionally-able and gifted pupils doing? Let us have a look at the activities and performance of 4 of these (see attached appendices).

7.1 OBJECTIVES

The school's objectives insofar as exceptionally-able and gifted pupils are concerned, revolve around:

- greater awareness
- greater enrichment
- greater extension
- greater involvement.

The system needs closer definition and structuring and empirical research is urgently required so that evaluation becomes a meaningful tool for further improvement.

7.2 STAFF ATTITUDES

Allowing for the presence of the expected Resistance-to-Change factor, response and reaction from teachers has been encouraging and co-operative. Once teachers were reassured that programmes for the gifted could be included in a way that did not add yet another burden to teachers' shoulders, greater interest in and involvement with such programmes became evident.

8. CONCLUSION

Michaelhouse cannot claim to have a highly-organised and highly-successful gifted pupil unit. The most that can be said is that, given the school's real efforts to meet the needs of all pupils as individuals, the exceptionally-able and gifted programmes have been a beneficial development. Much more needs to be done.

REFERENCES

(1) Bonnie Demming "80 Creative Ideas for Divergent Thinking" - from notes taken during a Summer Workshop CREATIVITY FOR GIFTED 1969.

(2) A Boarding School for "Brains" - Education Section - p 79 - Time Magazine October 27 1980.

(3) Belle Wallace "Teaching the Very Able Child" - Ward Lock Educational Books 1983 - p 67.

(4) Neil Jardine "Some Observations on the Exceptionally-Able Pupil & Ways of Approaching his Education at Michaelhouse" (unpublished).

ACADEMIC
Distinctions: Science, Maths, Geography

CULTURAL
Society Membership: Playreading, Motor*

*"interest is NARROW"

EXTENSION PROGRAMME
Science Olympiad
Rector's Sessions

RAYMOND
C.Age: 17.0
I Q : 139
Std 10

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILIITY
Sponsored Walk
Weed-clearing
Umgeni Valley

CREATIVE ARTS

SPORT
Squash, tennis, rugby, cross-country, soccer

OTHER INFORMATION:

- not among Top 20 in Std 9

ACADEMIC
Distinctions: Biology, Maths, Science, Geography
Exhibitioner

CULTURAL
Society Membership:
Junior Debating, Theatre, Natural History, Science, Hoër Taal, Bridge

EXTENSION PROGRAMME
Science and Maths Olympiads
Rector's Sessions
PINSSA Papers

FREDDIE

C.Age: 15.1

I Q : 145+

Std 9

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILIITY
Chronicle Committee
Christmas Cards
Visits to Sunfield Home
Horse Jump Assistant

CREATIVE ARTS
Miming Competition

SPORT
Swimming*, cricket, squash, tennis, hockey
- not particularly talented
* "commended for DETERMINATION"

OTHER INFORMATION:

- neck and spinal problems, wears a brace at times
- collected shells and stamps while at Prep School
- placed 4th in Std 8

ACADEMIC
Academic Honours,
Distinctions: Science, Maths
English, Computer Studies,
Latin
Trust Scholar

CULTURAL
Society Membership:
Junior Debating, Electronics,
Photographic*, Classics,
Science (Chairman), History,
Literary, Computer, Christian
Fellowship, Music, Business
Game
* 2nd prize in Competition on
"Human Movement"

EXTENSION PROGRAMME
Latin Olympiad
Science Olympiad: 31st
in RSA
English Olympiad: Top
15 in RSA
3 Guitar Concerts
Alan Paton Literary
PINSSA Papers
English Festival 1983
Prize Essays

GARY

C.Age: 17.0

I Q : 145+

Std 10

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILIITY
Sponsored Walk
Cultural Committee
Blood Donor
Service Committee
Bush-clearing
Library Monitor

CREATIVE ARTS
"Jesus Christ Superstar"
Plays guitar
Choir Festivals
"Joseph Dreamcoat" - chorus

SPORT
Rugby, hockey, cricket,
squash, tennis, soccer,
- not particularly talented

OTHER INFORMATION:

- Attended sessions for "intellectually superior" children at Natal University while at primary school

- placed 2nd in Standard 9

ACADEMIC
Academic Colours
Distinctions : Art, Maths, Latin, Music, Divinity, English & Science

A Aggregate: Std 9 exam

CULTURAL
Society Membership:
Junior Debating, Music, Art, Choral, Classics, Literary, Theatre, Christian Fellowship
Senior Debating

EXTENSION PROGRAMME
Alan Paton Literary
Science, Maths and English Olympiads,
Rector's Sessions,
Prize Essays

PAUL

C.Age: 16.6

I Q : 135

Std 10

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY
Midlands Marathon,
Chapel Organist,
40-Hour Famine,
Operation Cabbage,
Library Monitor

CREATIVE ARTS
Chapel Choir
Creative Art Sessions
School Windband
House Plays
Piano Recitals
"Amadeus"
"Jesus Christ Superstar"

SPORT
Rugby, Hockey*, Cricket,
Basketball 1st V
* Captain of U 15 A
Rock-climbing
Venture Club
Athletics
Cadet Platoon Leader

OTHER INFORMATION:

- Sound family background; Music Scholarship worth 75% of fees
- placed 7th in Standard 9